

# Early Edition

## Building Bright IDEAs in Early Childhood

*Dedicated to building partnerships between Tennessee families of young children with special needs and the professionals who join them on their journey*

Volume 1

Winter 2004

The Advisory Committee of “*Early Edition-Building Bright IDEAs in Early Childhood*” is committed to offering our readers meaningful information that will promote awareness of early childhood issues, increased collaboration, and the celebration of our successes in Tennessee. This initial issue is introductory in nature. Future issues will expand the focus on many of the successful ventures taking place in early childhood programs throughout Tennessee. If you have comments or would like to make a suggestion for an article, please contact us.

**Susan Addison-Editor**

*“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” Helen Keller*



*Joseph Fisher, Assistant Commissioner*

### *Welcome,*

I am pleased to launch the first edition of Tennessee’s newsletter dedicated to the implementation of programs and services for young children with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The period of early childhood is the foundation for all future learning and achievement for our children. Tennessee’s Department of Education and its Division of Special Education have the responsibility for leading the State’s efforts to ensure resources and supports are available to our youngest citizens and their families to promote each child’s developmental and educational success. As the lead agency for the State’s system of services to infants and toddlers and preschool children, the Department is dedicated to unified and continuous service delivery under IDEA.

This newsletter establishes a venue for sharing new and exciting information from the perspective of families and the multiplicity of stakeholders that comprise the structure of our State’s service system. The format is designed so that the organization of information in each edition is related to key components of IDEA.

**Part A** of IDEA sets forth the purposes, applicability, and regulations that apply to IDEA and has four main principles:

1. All children with disabilities have the same opportunity to succeed as their fellow students without disabilities at no extra cost to the student’s family.
2. Each child with a disability receives the individualized attention necessary to ensure that he/she has equal access to educational opportunities afforded his/her peers in school. This is provided in such a way that neither the rights of the child nor the parent are violated in the process.
3. All infants and toddlers with disabilities ages birth until their third birthday have access to early intervention services. This access is assured and all children ages 3 through 21 have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) because departments, agencies, and programs that assist children with disabilities and their families are supported in their efforts.
4. All children are ensured that programs providing early intervention and special education services meet the standards set forth in IDEA because systems are in place for ongoing review and improvement.

Newsletter articles related to this part will provide information such as updates on changes in regulations, policy, monitoring, state/program improvement, and other issues related to governance of IDEA implementation.



**Part B** of IDEA lays out the rights and processes for the provision of FAPE to school-aged children and includes elements specifically related to preschool services. In this area of the newsletter, information on promising and science-based practices in the delivery of preschool services will be presented. Preschool programs that have demonstrated success in key areas of service delivery will be featured.

**Part C** of IDEA outlines services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. It requires the coordination of services and supports to families to enhance their capacity to promote their child's development. A key purpose of Part C is to reduce the likelihood of the need for extensive interventions over the lifespan of the child. The model of interagency coordination established under Part C exemplifies the cooperation and teamwork that is the essence of IDEA. This section of the newsletter will provide information on promising and science-based practices in the delivery of early intervention services and features various service providers across the State.

**Part D** of IDEA deals with personnel development, research activities, and dissemination of information. Articles in this area of the newsletter will provide current information related to research-based practices, training, and technical assistance activities and resources.

The Tennessee Department of Education is committed to ensuring that all young children with disabilities are afforded the same opportunities as their peers for developmental and educational progress. We join with key players in the service delivery system in the belief that effective communication is a critical aspect of ensuring that these opportunities are available and coordinated. This newsletter will serve as one venue in our efforts to put this belief into action. Members of the committee who make it a reality, for this and future editions, are commended for their role in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



Joseph Fisher  
Assistant Commissioner

## **Part A of IDEA includes the general provisions of the act**

### **The Interagency Coordinating Council Promotes Hands-on Involvement**

**Lynne F. Harmon**  
**Interagency Coordinating Council Chairperson**

The Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) was formed in Tennessee fifteen years ago. The Council's main objective is guiding and assisting the State Department of Education with implementation of all components of Tennessee's Early Intervention System. The Governor of Tennessee appoints the Council members as specified in Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. ICC membership must be representative of the population of the state. Appointees currently consist of parents, private providers of early intervention services, a physician, a member of the legislature, and a member involved in personnel preparation in higher education. Also included are members of each of the state agencies involved in early intervention services or payments, including Head Start, Department of Education, Department of Commerce and Insurance, Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Department



of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, and the Division of Mental Retardation Services.

The ICC has assisted in developing all aspects of Tennessee's Early Intervention System, from the origination of Tennessee's Definition of Developmental Delay, to reviewing and approving plans for evaluation guidelines, to making recommendations regarding agency directory formats. The partnership and collaborative efforts of families, early intervention system providers, local TEIS district offices, local interagency coordinating councils, and technical assistance groups in conjunction with the state department are the cornerstone for the many successes achieved by infants and toddlers with special needs. Informing and involving the ICC in these efforts promotes effective systems change across our state.

The ICC has been committed to increasing parental involvement. It has recently approved three areas of focus for the parent vision developed as part of the National Parent Leadership Conference (Spring, 2003). These areas include:

- Strengthening communication between the ICC and the LICC's,
- Increasing diversity on the ICC and LICCs, and
- Increasing active involvement of all ICC members.

Committees have been formed to further address these areas. In addition, an ICC retreat is planned for April

2004, which will be attended by ICC and LICC representatives to develop a vision for the future of early intervention in Tennessee.

The ICC meets quarterly. All persons interested in early intervention services are welcome to attend!

ICC meeting dates for 2004 are:

- January 13, 2004
- April 15, 2004
- July 13, 2004
- October 12, 2004

All ICC meetings are open to the public. The location of the meetings listed above is yet to be determined. For the time of day, location, and any special accommodations required to attend, please contact the Technical Assistance group of Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS) at 423-439-7548.

A listserv has been developed to promote communication between the ICC membership and LICC chairpersons. While the listserv is only available to the ICC and LICC members, the LICC chairpersons will distribute information and announcements to their councils and communities.



**Part B of IDEA includes the provision of free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all children with disabilities, including preschoolers**

## **The Next Steps for Preschoolers**

**Debbie Cate, Sondra Dade, and Kay Flowers  
Preschool Consultants,  
TN Division of Special Education**

A free appropriate public education (FAPE) is available to all children with disabilities, ages three through nine, beginning on their third birthday. Preschool typically refers to children whose ages range from three to five years.

Local school systems make services available to children with disabilities based on the individual needs of the child. Professionals evaluate every child who may be eligible for

special education. Parents are considered full partners in the evaluation process.

When it is determined that the child is eligible for special education, the family and representatives from the school system, as a team, develop an individualized education program (IEP). This plan identifies the strengths and needs of the child and provides annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks, which describe the expected progress. The child's progress is monitored and reported on a regular basis.

A child's IEP is developed for one year and is reviewed annually. The team may decide to review and make changes in the IEP whenever there is a need.







Once a plan has been developed for the child, the team determines what special education and related services are needed to support the plan. "Special education" means specially designed instruction. These services are provided at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

To assist a child with a disability in benefiting from special education, related services may be provided.

- Recreation
- Social work
- Orientation and mobility services
- Counseling
- Other services as needed

Preschool children with disabilities may be served in a variety of early childhood settings, such as school system preschool programs, community preschool programs, home-based instruction, or Head Start programs.

The team determines the educational setting for each eligible child. Services must meet the needs of the individual child and be provided in the least restrictive environment. To the maximum extent appropriate, preschoolers with disabilities are educated with children who have no disabilities. It is the responsibility of the team to consider the least restrictive environment for each child.



#### These services may include:

- Transportation
- Speech-language therapy
- Audiological services
- Psychological services
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- School nursing services

### Family Spotlight

*"Our son Aaron has CHARGE syndrome and is multi-challenged. The preschool program that Aaron participated in continued the support that Aaron first received through Tennessee's Early Intervention System. Aaron has transitioned to kindergarten and is having a wonderful year, due to the special education support he has received in collaboration with the team of professionals working with us. Many people in Aaron's school have learned to use sign language, and Aaron's response to their efforts has surprised even us! The entire school has accepted Aaron and helped encourage him to communicate independently. Their support has allowed Aaron to be a regular member of his class and his community."*

**Susan and Steve Hiscuitt**

*"Aaron has done better than anyone on the team expected, and so quickly! We have already met as a team this year to develop new goals, because Aaron has had his "perfect day", and was ready for new challenges. Preschool classes in Sullivan County are located in elementary school settings, along with Head Start and DOE pre-school programs. Our programs are growing and many more students are able to move into regular kindergarten with supports and services. Our preschool programs have been very successful." To inquire about preschool services, call your local education agency.*

**Cindy Greene, Supervisor of Special Education, Sullivan County School**

## Part of IDEA includes the provisions for the early intervention system for infants, toddlers, and their families.

### Tomorrow's Success Begins Today

**Susan Addison**  
**Training and Information Resource Consultant**  
**Tennessee's Early Intervention System**



Who will help the toddler with cerebral palsy? Who will support the non-English speaking family when they learn their newborn has Down syndrome? Who will lend a hand to the foster parent caring for a shaken baby? And what about the preemie born too soon? The stories are

compelling, and each is unique, representing the beginning of a lifelong journey of hope.

The early intervention system is a federally supported entitlement program under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Eligible infants and toddlers, birth through two years of age with special needs and their families participate in early intervention programs. According to Tennessee's 2002 Child Count, 5426 families across the state received support from the early intervention system.

The Tennessee Department of Education is the designated lead agency for the State's early intervention system. Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS) is the single point of entry into a comprehensive, coordinated system of services for families of infants and toddlers with special needs.

Early intervention services are provided in a variety of settings including natural environments where children without disabilities participate. These services are provided at no cost to eligible families in Tennessee. There are nine district TEIS offices serving families across the state.

Referrals to the early intervention system come from a variety of sources. Parents, grandparents, physicians, health care providers, service agencies, and others may make referrals by calling 1-800-852-7157 or the local TEIS office number in their area.

When a referral is made, a service coordinator is appointed and contacts the family to schedule a time to meet. Under Part C of IDEA, service coordinators are responsible for helping families by:

- Coordinating the performance of evaluations and assessments;
- Assisting in the development, review, and evaluation of the individualized family service plans (IFSP); identifying available service providers;
- Coordinating and monitoring the delivery of available services;
- Informing families of the availability of advocacy services;
- Coordinating with medical and health providers; and
- Facilitating the development of a transition plan to preschool services.

At the initial visit, the service coordinator explains the early intervention system and the rights and procedural safeguards available to families of eligible children. The child may receive a developmental screening at this visit. When appropriate, plans will be made, with the family's permission, to arrange a multidisciplinary evaluation for eligibility. Families may choose to participate in a family assessment to further determine their priorities and concerns.

When eligibility has been established, planning begins to develop a program that meets the individual needs of the child and family. Within 45 days of referral, the family, evaluator(s), service coordinator, and other team members will meet to develop the initial individualized family service plan.

An IFSP is both a written document and an ongoing process designed to support the infant or toddler's developmental needs. The IFSP includes a description of the child's present levels of development. It identifies the family's priorities, resources and concerns, then details the steps necessary to assist the child and family. Natural supports that complement the child and family's everyday routines are emphasized.

The IFSP is a living document that is reviewed after six months and re-written annually. Additionally, the IFSP team

may review and revise the plan at any time at the request of the family, the service coordinator, or a service provider.

Transitions occur throughout a family's time in early intervention. The service coordinator assists the family by facilitating smooth transitions. With the family's permission, the service coordinator will make a referral to the local education agency (LEA) by the time the child is two years of age. Three to six months before the child's third birthday, the service coordinator will arrange a transition conference with the LEA and other appropriate parties. This allows the family to meet with the local school system and/or other appropriate community providers.

The LEA determines eligibility for special education services that may begin at age three. Families of children who are not eligible for special education at age three will be assisted in transitioning to other local community programs.

The foundation for carrying out the above responsibilities is based on a commitment to family-centered early intervention practices. Families are key members of the IFSP team and determine the level of involvement they desire from the early intervention system.

In answer to the question, "Who will help?" consider the story of Emily who was born with spina bifida, hydrocephalus, and other health concerns. Following her birth and discharge from the newborn intensive care unit, a TEIS service coordinator visited the family in their home, and

the early intervention process began. Throughout their time in early intervention, the family led the way in developing outcomes for Emily. She was quite successful at achieving her goals. After multiple surgeries, Emily is very much on the move! Whether using her walker, riding her adapted tricycle, or navigating her wheelchair, Emily is very mobile and independent. Communicating primarily via sign language initially, Emily is becoming more and more verbal. Overcoming sensory issues, Emily has even won ribbons for her expertise in the saddle. Through all phases of service delivery, the family is the constant in a child's life. In each stage of early intervention, the family gains knowledgeable skills and abilities enabling them to apply this wisdom throughout their child's life.



### Family Spotlight

*"From the beginning there were so many people involved in Emily's care that we were often overwhelmed by the paperwork and all the procedures necessary for filing for assistance through different agencies. There was always one person who brought it all into perspective and made everything work together for us. Our early intervention service coordinator taught us how to be organized and conquer one challenge at a time."*

Lisa and Jeff Mattheiss, Parents of Emily

Somewhere in the state of Tennessee a baby is being born with a developmental disability. The family will turn to TEIS as the single point of entry into the Part C system. When families and professionals partner with each other, they ensure that 'tomorrow's success begins today'. If you know someone who might benefit from early intervention services, encourage them to contact TEIS today by calling: 1-800-852-7157.





**Part of IDEA includes national activities to improve education of children with disabilities including research and innovation, personnel preparation, technical assistance, and dissemination of information.**

## Information is on the Way

### Alexis Burkett, Program Coordinator Training and Technical Assistance Tennessee's Early Intervention System



Tennessee's Early Intervention System Training and Technical Assistance (TEIS-TA) is administered through the Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Learning and Development at East Tennessee State University. This office supports the implementation of the statewide system by assisting families, TEIS

district offices, and the lead agency, which is the Department of Education.

A major component of TEIS-TA involves training and personnel development. A yearly statewide training calendar is developed based on needs identified by TEIS offices, service providers, families, and the lead agency. These workshops have covered a wide array of areas-including theory, research-based practices, philosophy, and hands-on activities.

Training topics have addressed eligibility evaluation tools, individualized family service plan (IFSP) development, adaptive play ideas for infants and toddlers, cultural diversity, service provision in natural environments, and sensory processing. Participation in the workshops has increased dramatically during the past two years, including more family members and many school system preschool personnel.

This program of training is accessible to a wide range of service providers and provides in-kind support for the State's Head Start Collaboration Office. In addition to the trainings, TEIS-TA also provides support for statewide conferences for personnel development and facilitates technical support for district offices as needs are identified.

A central directory of services for each district is updated and published annually through the TA office. It is published as a small, user-friendly book distributed to and

used by families and service providers. It includes information on local early intervention service providers, county and state agencies, and national services. It is also now available on the TEIS-TA website

(<http://child.etsu.edu/center/projects/teistech/index.htm>).

The TA office has been the center for data collection for TEIS. Each year a federal child count based on infants and toddlers served by early intervention providers statewide is collected and submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and to the Tennessee Department of Education.

#### This count includes:

- Children served
- Services provided
- Program settings
- Exiting information
- Early intervention personnel

In addition to the federal child count, TEIS-TA has developed a data collection system for each of the district offices that provides data for and about operational activities in the local TEIS offices.

#### These data include information on:

- Referrals
- Intakes
- IFSP meetings
- Services provided
- Evaluations
- Transitions

Reports on monies spent on services and how many children are receiving services are created on a quarterly basis.

Administrative assistance is provided to the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) by TEIS-TA. On-site support to program activities is given as needed, and the ICC listserv is moderated by this office.



**Early Edition** is published quarterly by Tennessee's Early Intervention System in collaboration with the Office of Early Childhood Programs, Division of Special Education within the Tennessee State Department of Education and the newsletter Advisory Committee. Readers' comments and contributions related to the special needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families may be mailed to the editor.

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**Early Edition** is distributed free of charge to those interested in issues related to children, ages birth through five, with special needs. To add or delete your name from the mailing list, or to notify us of a change of address, please send your name, address, and phone number to:

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## Editor's Note

All articles contained in this newsletter were gathered for the specific purpose of sharing information and should not be taken as a direct endorsement by the TN Department of Education or the Division of Special Education.



Department of Education; Jan. 2004;  
Publication Authorization No. 331461,  
7014 copies. This public document was  
promulgated at a cost of \$ 0.2144 per copy.

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